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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000105

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S - GALANEK

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: RULING PARTY POISED FOR MAJOR SPLIT

[11](#). SUMMARY: Amid the continuing rift within Malawi's ruling United Democratic Front (UDF), two senior party officials have resigned their positions on the party's National Executive Committee. Former president Muluzi, in his capacity as party chairman, is now openly seeking to expel President Mutharika from the UDF. Meanwhile President Mutharika appears to building new political alliances. END SUMMARY.

RESIGNATIONS, FIRINGS AND NEW ALLIANCES

[12](#). UDF Publicity Secretary Salule Masangwi and Director of Agricultural Affairs Dr. Ben Dzowela resigned this week, the latest event in the ever-widening rift between former President Bakili Muluzi, who remains UDF National Chairman, and President Bingu wa Mutharika. Dzowela, a former ambassador-at-large and erstwhile party loyalist, said in a statement released to the press that he had resigned in part due to "manipulative efforts that are being made by the National Chairman, Dr Bakili Muluzi... drunk with power to selfishly and deliberately frustrate the efforts of the State President, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika and his administration's determined resolve fight graft and corruption."

[12](#). Earlier in the week Minister of Home Affairs and Internal Security Uladi Mussa claimed that the ruling UDF is planning to expel President Bingu wa Mutharika from the party. Mussa, who on January 30 walked out of UDF national executive meeting in protest, said party leaders had already decided to expel Mutharika and the executive committee had refused to discuss the matter. Mussa, who is seen as a Mutharika loyalist, this week lost his position as the UDF's Regional Governor in Malawi's Central Region after Muluzi dissolved the three UDF regional committees. Only those loyal to Muluzi were maintained or appointed to new committees announced immediately after dissolution of the old ones. In another twist to the plot, there were unconfirmed reports that should Mutharika be expelled from the party, Muluzi would be arrested shortly thereafter on corruption charges.

[13](#). Mutharika has been meeting informally in recent days with leaders of some of the smaller parties, an indication that he may be building new alliances. Supporters of two of those parties were prominently placed at the front of the crowd at a major policy launch event last weekend. Also this week, opposition leader John Tembo, who heads the Malawi Congress Party, attended a presidential event and was seated front row center. Tembo has not attended this type of event in the past, and the president went out of his way to publicly greet the opposition leader in front of the cameras. The media continues to speculate that Mutharika will form his own party, although the president has denied any intention to do so.

COMMENT

[14](#). The advent of respected political figures publicly "choosing sides" further emphasizes the deepening divide between supporters of Mutharika and Muluzi, which began with the president's corruption crackdown and may well end with the complete fragmentation of the party. If Muluzi does expel Mutharika from the UDF, our reading of Malawi's constitution is that it would have no impact on the presidency. In any case, it is apparent that if Mutharika does leave the party, he will take a large number of officials with him and further marginalize Muluzi's place on the national political scene. Mutharika's expulsion from the UDF could also make an informal alliance between Government and the opposition more palatable to both sides, strengthening the President's hand in advancing economic reforms. The political stability of the country is not at risk, though the future of the UDF certa